



**SCHOOL NURSE**  
*Workshop*

**Identifying and Managing Anxiety**

Lauren Byrd MS LPC-S

June 20, 2024



Children's  
of Alabama®

A young child wearing goggles and a life preserver, floating in a pool of water. The child is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The water is clear and blue, with some bubbles around the child. The background is a soft, out-of-focus view of the pool's surface and surrounding area.

# Identifying and Managing Anxiety

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Practical Strategies and Approaches

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# Objectives

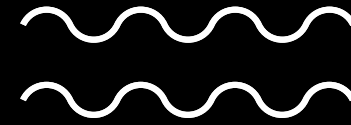
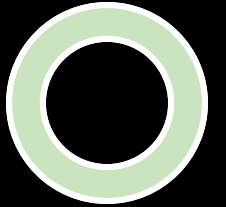
A man in a dark blue suit and yellow tie is walking through a maze drawn on a dark, textured surface. The maze is composed of thick, light-colored lines forming a complex path. The man is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the maze, facing right.

- Learn to identify children or adolescents at-risk for anxiety disorders
- Learn behaviors that could indicate anxiety
- Explore strategies to help youth with anxiety in the school environment

# About Me

- Licensed Professional Therapist and Supervising LPC
- PHP/IOP Program Manager at Childrens of Alabama
- Is not at all anxious during this presentation

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# Why Address Anxiety in Schools ?



Students need to do their work

Anxiety disorders can make it hard for students to get schoolwork done or study.



Students need to build prosocial relationships

It may affect their relationships with peers and teachers, too.



School helps link access to care

"Despite the availability of effective treatments for anxiety, less than one-half of youths needing mental health treatment receive any care, and fewer still receive evidence-based care"



Students need to be in school

In some cases, students with anxiety disorders miss a lot of school days.



It takes a village to keep our children safe

"Among adolescents with anxiety, 9% were reported to have had suicidal ideation, and 6% made suicide attempts"

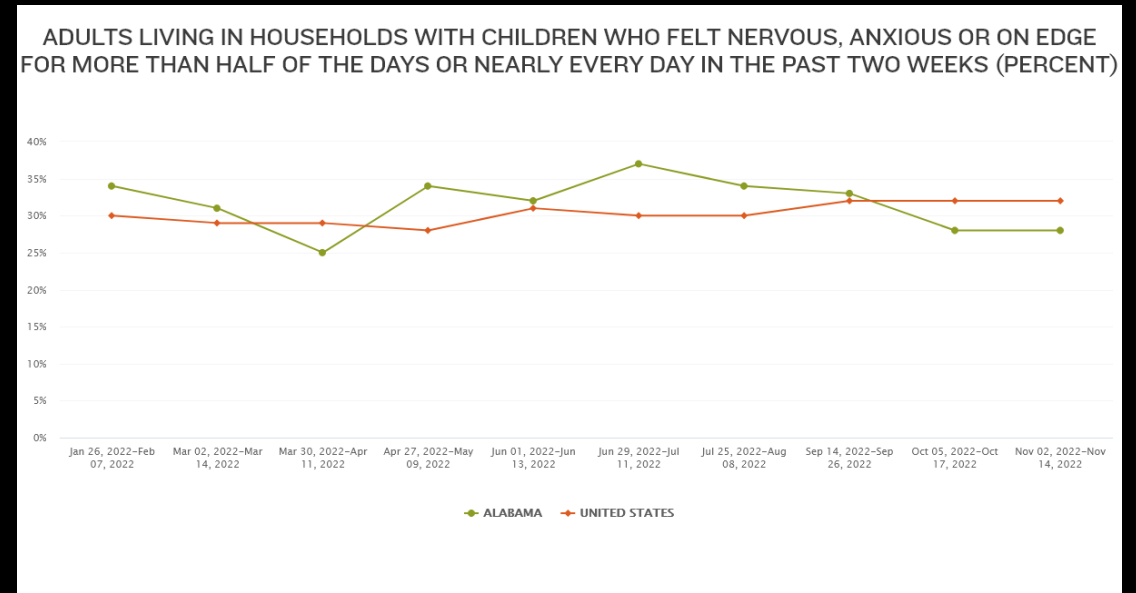
# Why are School Nurses so Integral To Identifying Anxiety?

- Anxiety can often look like and accompany physical ailments
  - Upset stomach
  - Headaches
  - Heart racing
  - Breathing difficulties
  - Body aches/tense muscles
  - Excessive sweating
  - Nausea/vomiting
- School nurses are on the frontline of student health and mental healthcare and are in a unique position for early detection of mental health issues
- School nurses are skilled in connecting families to extra resources while collaborating with others in the school setting
- Helpful for those children who are unaware they may have mental health needs or are struggling with stigma of needing emotional support



# Prevalence of Anxiety

- Anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents.
  - Nearly 7% of youths worldwide have an anxiety disorder.
  - 9.4% of children aged 3-17 years (approximately 5.8 million) had diagnosed anxiety in 2016-2019 in the United States
  - 8.8% of children in Alabama have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression
  - In Alabama (2022) 31% of adults in household reported having a child in the home who showed behaviors that could indicate anxiety.
- Anxiety disorders (especially generalized anxiety) are highly comorbid with each other and with other psychiatric disorders particularly



# What is Anxiety and What is Growing Up?

## **Likely Typical behavior**

- Anxiety or worry feelings may be uncomfortable but don't impact performance
- Anxious feelings are brief and once the issue is resolved, pass.
- Adolescents spending more time with friends and less time with parents
- Adolescents more concerned with appearance

## **Check in for Support**

- Anxiety levels rise enough to cause impairment or decrease performance
- Worry is excessive for the situation
- Anxiety or worry may last for several days, weeks, or months
- Avoiding friends and avoiding social activities
- School Refusal



# Stress vs. Anxiety

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## Stress

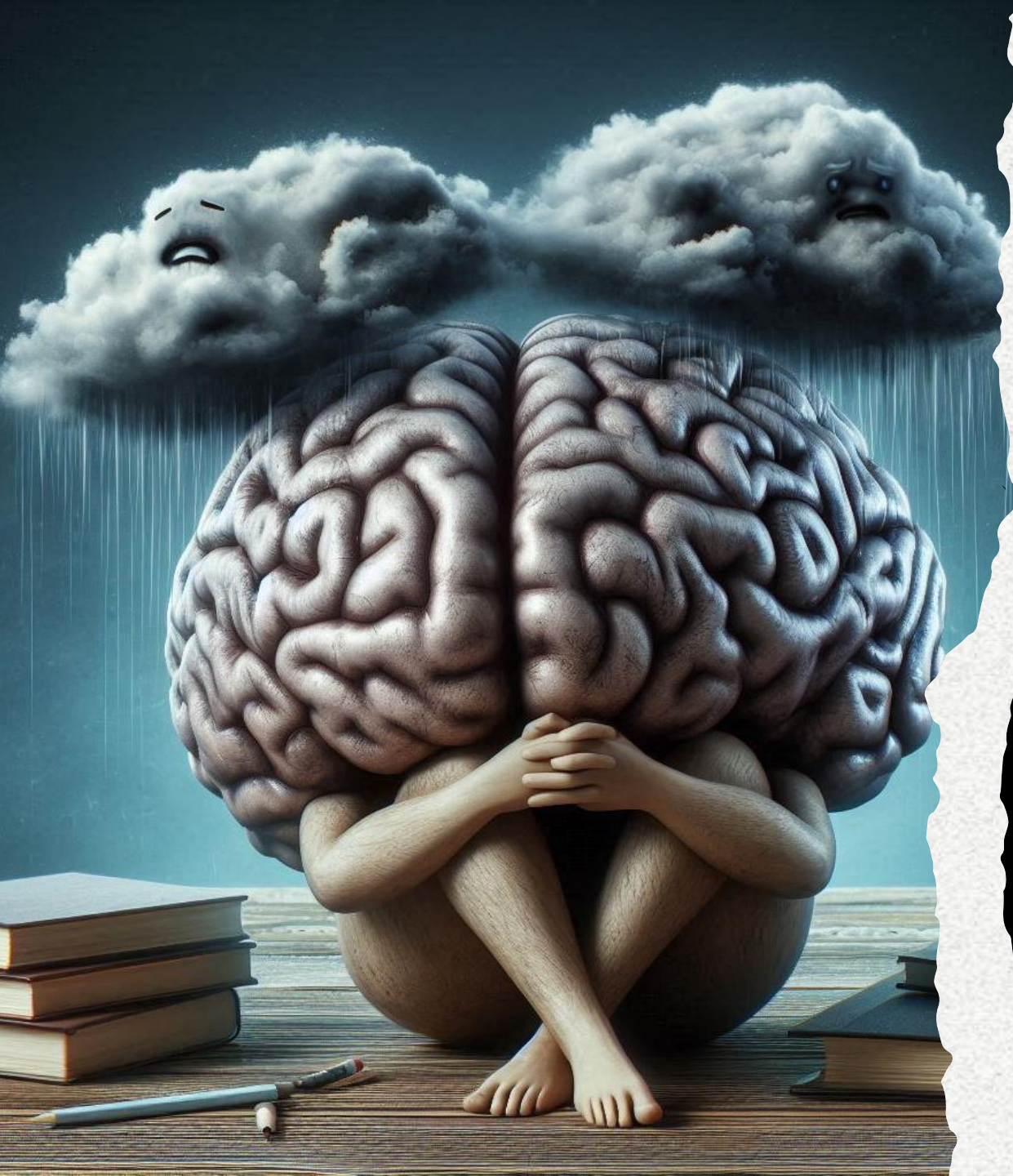
- Generally is a response to an external cause, such as taking a big test or arguing with a friend.
- Goes away once the situation is resolved.
- Can be positive or negative. For example, it may inspire you to meet a deadline, or it may cause you to lose sleep.

## Both Stress and Anxiety

- Both stress and anxiety can affect your mind and body. You may experience symptoms such as:
  - Excessive worry
  - Uneasiness
  - Tension
  - Headaches or body pain
  - High blood pressure
  - Loss of sleep

## Anxiety

- Generally is internal, meaning it's your reaction to stress.
- Usually involves a persistent feeling of apprehension or dread that doesn't go away, and that interferes with how you live your life.
- Is constant, even if there is no immediate threat.



# Understanding Anxiety

## Common Types of Anxiety Disorders

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
  - Will have many worries and worry much of the time. They may also have physical symptoms, like headaches, stomachaches, muscle tension, or tiredness.
  - May feel restless, keyed up, on-edge
  - May have difficulty sleeping
  - Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
  - Onset usually late adolescence.
- Social Anxiety Disorder
  - significant anxiety and discomfort about being embarrassed, humiliated, rejected or looked down on in social interactions.
  - will try to avoid the situation or endure it with great anxiety.
  - The fear or anxiety causes problems with daily functioning and lasts at least six months.
  - Typical age of onset around later school-age and early adolescent years


# Types of Anxiety (cont)

- Separation Anxiety Disorder
  - Often onsets during preschool/early school-age years
  - excessively fearful or anxious about separation from those with whom he or she is attached. The feeling is beyond what is appropriate for the person's age, persists (at least four weeks in children and six months in adults) and causes problems functioning.
  - may be persistently worried about losing the person closest to him or her, may be reluctant or refuse to go out or sleep away from home or without that person, or may experience nightmares about separation.
- Specific Phobias
  - often starts in the school-age years;
  - excessive and persistent fear of a specific object, situation or activity that is generally not harmful. Pt knows their fear is excessive, but they can't overcome it. These fears cause such distress that some people go to extreme lengths to avoid what they fear.
- Panic Disorder
  - attacks, an overwhelming combination of physical and psychological distress.
    - Physical Symptoms: Palpitations, pounding heart or rapid heart rate, Sweating, Trembling or shaking, Feeling of shortness of breath or smothering sensations, Chest pain, Feeling dizzy, light-headed or faint, Feeling of choking, Numbness or tingling, Chills or hot flashes, Nausea or abdominal pains
    - Emotional Symptoms: Feeling detached, Fear of losing control, Fear of dying
    - The mean age for onset of panic disorder is 20-24 or later adolescent
- Agoraphobia
- Selective mutism

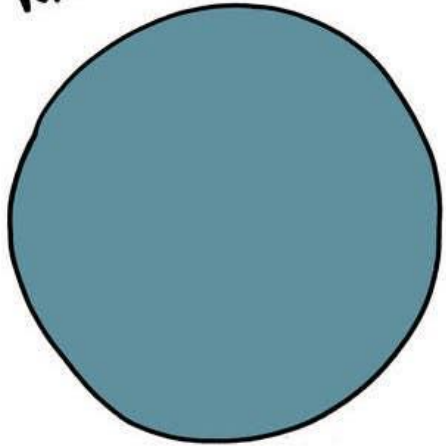




# Anxiety Risk Factors

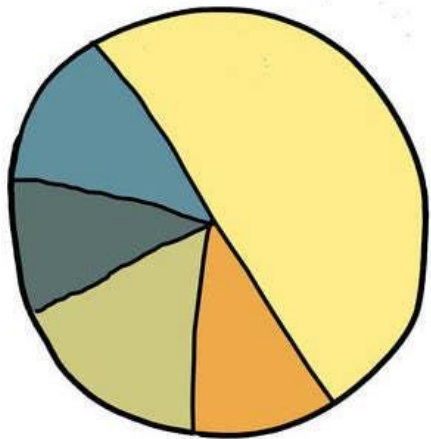
- Genetic
  - Personality
  - Attachment difficulties
  - Family conflict
  - Parental overprotection
    - Study about school staff relationships
  - Early parental separation
  - Child mistreatment
- 

## WHO PEOPLE THINK CAN HAVE ANXIETY



shy introverts

## WHO CAN ACTUALLY HAVE ANXIETY

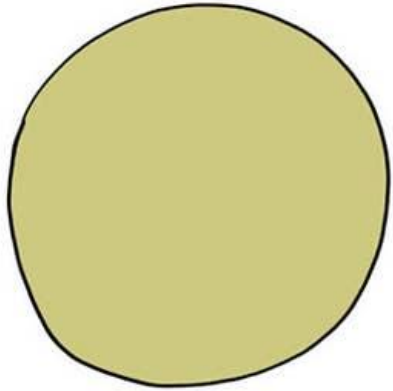


introverts  
extroverts  
shy people  
social people  
ANYONE, OK?  
ANYONE CAN.

# Anxiety Risk Factors (cont.)

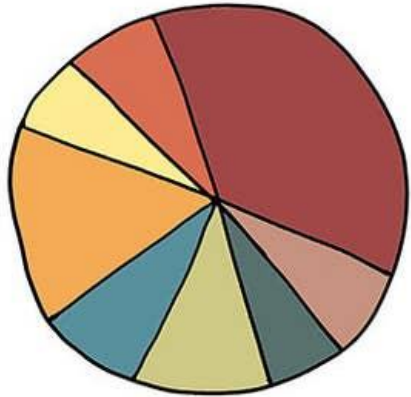
- LGBTQ youth
- Older adolescents (age 12 - 17)
- Girls and women
- Excessive caffeine use (can exacerbate symptoms)
- Some physical health conditions, such as thyroid problems or heart arrhythmia

## WHAT PEOPLE THINK ANXIETY FEELS LIKE



Worrying about everything, all the time

## WHAT ANXIETY ACTUALLY FEELS LIKE



- sweating, a lot
- second-guessing yourself
- muscle tension
- trouble sleeping
- chest pain
- overthinking all the things
- increased heart rate
- Your mind and body refusing to cooperate, no matter what you know is rational

# Identifying Anxiety in Students

## Signs to Look For

- Changes in behavior or academic performance
- Physical complaints without medical cause
  - Doesn't mean those complaints aren't real
- Excessive need for reassurance
- Behavioral inhibition (fearful of novelty)
- Irritability
- Increased early dismissal/absences
- Parent/parenting factors
- Stressful/traumatic exposures
- Insecure attachment
- Can be a high-achieving, outgoing child



# Identifying Anxiety in Students

- Screening Tools and Methods
  - Questionnaires
    - There is no empirically based recommendation for universal screening for anxiety disorders in children and adolescents however in primary care, school. Or other child-serving settings freely available general social-emotional screening instruments can be deployed systematically to standardize identification of anxiety concerns
      - Pediatric Symptom Checklist
      - SCARED
    - Early identification of an anxiety concern, if confirmed as a problem upon follow-up assessment, can facilitate early intervention. The United States Preventative Services Task Force recommends that primary care clinicians screen patients aged 8-64 years for anxiety

# Questionnaires and Screeners

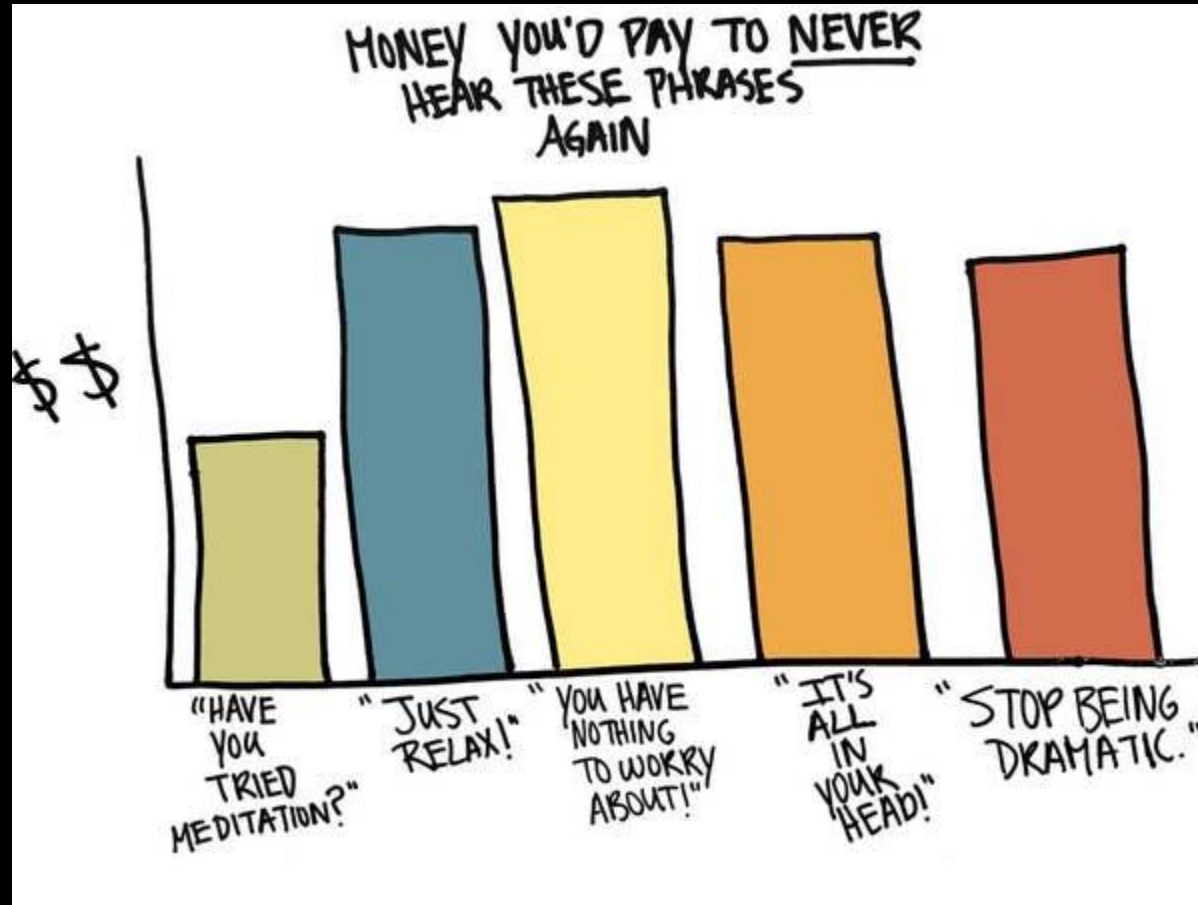
## Pediatric Symptom Checklist

- The Pediatric Symptom Checklist (PSC) is a brief questionnaire that helps identify and assess changes in emotional and behavioral problems in children. The PSC covers a broad range of emotional and behavioral problems and is meant to provide an assessment of psychosocial functioning
- Valid for ages 3 to 18
- In addition to the original 35-item parent-reported questionnaire, there are translations into more than two dozen other languages, a youth self-report, a pictorial version and a shorter 17-item version for both parents and youth.
- Mental Health America provides the PSC with online score reports for free:
  - [PSC - Parent Screening Version](#)
  - [PSC - Youth Self-report Version](#) also has 35 items
- It is important to emphasize that the PSC is not designed to produce a diagnosis or to serve as a direct conduit to a specific treatment or medication. Instead it is meant to provide clinicians with suggestions for which patients may

## SCARED

- Validated for use with children 8-18 years old of various ethnicities.<sup>1-3</sup>
- **Note:** For aged 8 to 11 years, recommended use includes the clinician explaining all questions, or having an adult present to answer any of the child's questions.<sup>1</sup>
- This tool is available in the following languages<sup>4</sup>: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Thai
- A clinician in school-based settings can utilize this screening tool . **A cut-off score of  $\geq 25$  warrants referral to a qualified health care professional.** This referral could be to a patient's established primary care physician (PCP) or other properly trained health care provider.
- **Time:** 10 minutes<sup>4</sup>
- **Cost:** Free
- **Equipment:** None
- **Training:** None


# Immediate Support Strategies (to Avoid)







# Crisis Support Strategies

- Deep Breathing Exercises
    - Diaphragmatic Breathing
    - 4-wall breath
    - Discouraging shallow breathing in general
  - Grounding
    - 5-4-3-2-1
    - Hand tracing
    - Focus tools
    - TIPP (temp change, intense aerobic, exercise, paced breathing, progressive muscle relaxation)
  - Creating a Safe Space
    - Space to talk about what they are experiencing
- 

# Balloon Breathing

THINK OF YOUR BELLY AS A BALLOON



## INHALE

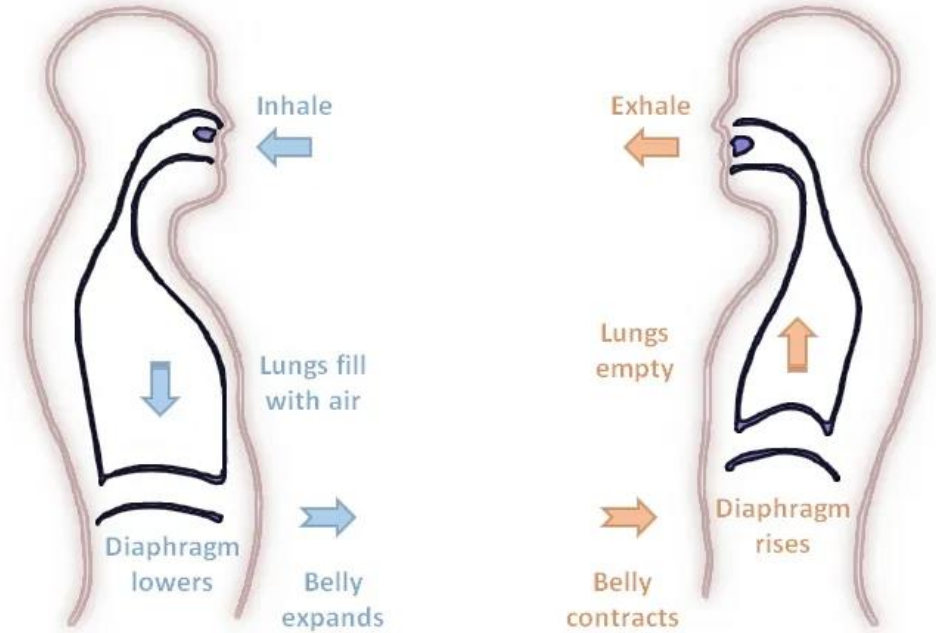
Place your hands on your belly and breathe in slowly through your nose.

Feel your belly, abdomen, and chest expanding out like a balloon. Hold your breath for 2 seconds.

## EXHALE

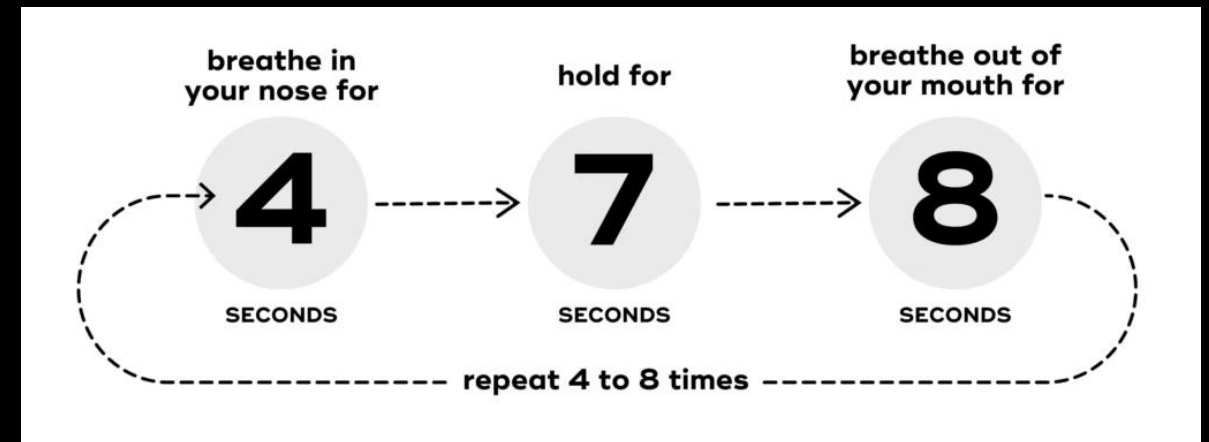
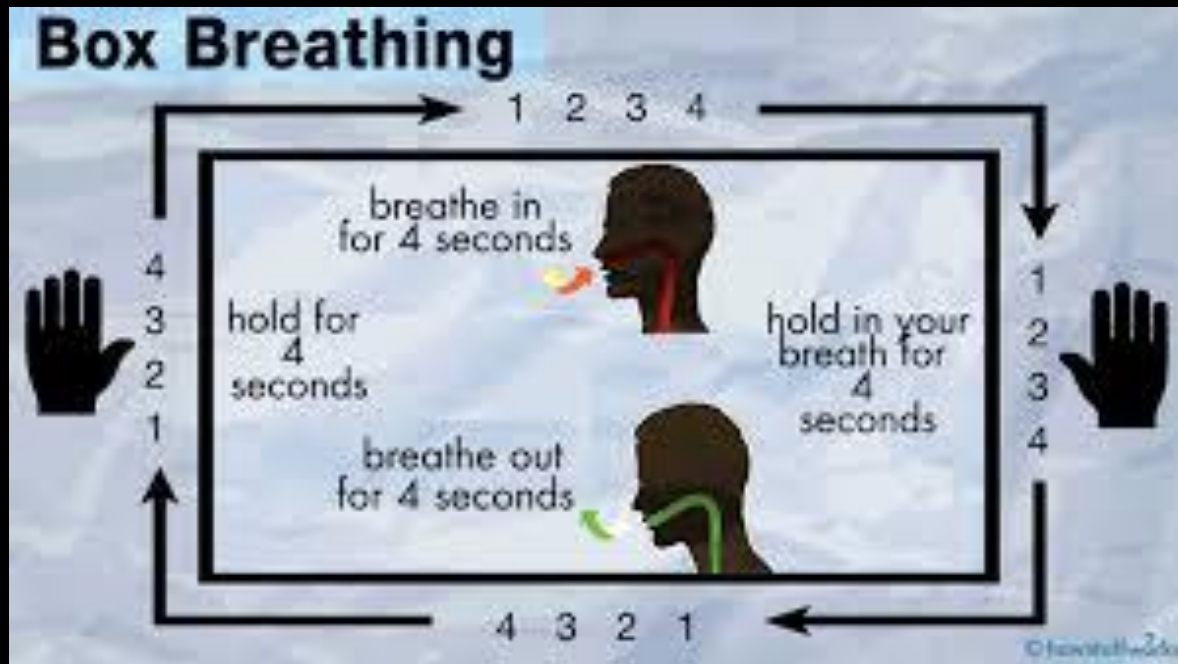
Open your mouth and slowly blow all the air out of your lungs as if deflating your imaginary balloon.

Repeat this exercise five to tens times or until you are calm.



Breathing Techniques to Manage Anxiety

# Breathing Techniques to Manage Anxiety



## TECHNIQUES TO

# GROUND YOURSELF



### 5, 4, 3, 4, 1

Look around you and count **5** things you see. Say them out loud. Now **4** things you can feel. Now **3** things you can hear. Now **2** things that you can smell. Lastly, **1** thing you can smell.



### WATER

Splash some cold water on your face or arms. How does it feel? What do you notice? If you are looking for a more intense sensation, try holding an ice cube in your hand.



### BREATHE DEEPLY

First, empty your lungs of all air. Now, take a very slow deep breath through your nose. Feel the air fill you up as you breath into your belly. Hold the air in your lungs for 5 seconds, the slowly let it out through your mouth for 5 seconds. Take 5 of these deep, slow breaths.



### BODY SCAN

Do a scan of your body focus on each place where your body is touching another surface. Start at your feet, are they on the ground? Touching your shoes? Feel your legs wrapped in a blanket or your back against your chair and work your way up to your head.



### STRETCH & MOVE

Do something physical, like stretching, jumping up and down, stomping your feet, running up the stairs. Notice how your muscles engage in these activities.

# Grounding Exercises

- 5-4-3-2-1
- Hand tracing
- Focus tools
- TIPP (temp change, intense aerobic, exercise, paced breathing, progressive muscle relaxation)



# DIALECTAL BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY

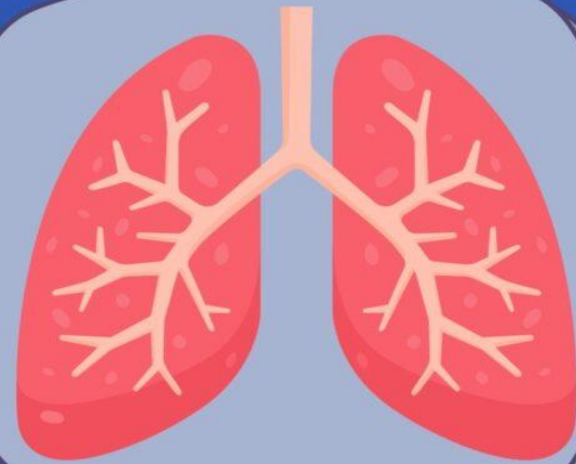
## THE TIPP SKILL



Temperature



Intense Exercise



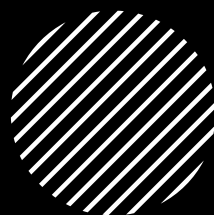
Paced Breathing



Paired Muscle Relaxation



# Long-term Support Strategies



- Developing an individualized plan
  - Collaborating with mental health professionals and community resources
  - Implementing accommodations (ex: extended test time, therapist visits ...)
  - Be the wonderful clinician you are!
    - They let you know they needed help that's HUGE!
      - Keep listening
      - Check in on how they are doing
      - Be another supportive adult in their world

# Long-term Support Strategies

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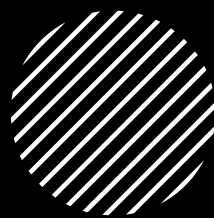
- Education and Training
    - Teaching Coping Skills and “Anxiety Health Tips”
    - Providing psychoeducation to students and staff
      - Being healthy can be especially important for children with depression or anxiety. In addition to getting the right treatment, leading a healthy lifestyle can play a role in managing symptoms of depression or anxiety. Here are some healthy behaviors that may help:
        - Having a healthy eating plan centered on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes (for example, beans, peas, and lentils), lean protein sources, and nuts and seeds
        - Participating in physical activity for at least 60 minutes each day
        - Getting the recommended amount of sleep each night based on age
        - Practicing mindfulness or relaxation techniques
- 







# Referral to Mental Health Profession als



- Typical Treatment
  - Most types of anxiety respond well to therapeutic interventions. Modalities such as CBT or ACT are evidence-based to improve anxiety symptoms. Sometimes medications are combined with therapy for best outcomes. Much of the same meds for adult anxiety are also used to treat children, with consideration to size of child for dosages.
- When to Refer
  - Persistent or worsening symptoms
  - Lack of improvement with initial interventions
- Referral Process
  - How to refer
    - Strategy is dependent on location, but adequate referral may include an outpatient therapist, psychiatrist, and primary care physician if not already identified. Collaborating with the school counselor or social worker to have all referral documentation.
  - Follow-up and coordination with external providers



# Collaboration with School Staff



- Communication Strategies
  - Regular meetings with teachers and counselors
  - Developing a consistent support plan
- Building a Supportive Environment
  - Promoting awareness and understanding among staff and students
  - Working with school counselors and teachers to share what works



# Working with Parents and Guardians

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- Effective Communication
  - Discussing concerns and observations
  - Sharing resources and strategies
    - Examples:
      - Helping parents and children come up with a plan for coping. Things the student can try to cope before saying they want to go home or not come to school can help build a team of support.
- Supporting Home Environment
  - Encouraging consistent routines
    - Healthy sleep, reduced screen time, etc.
  - Providing guidance on managing anxiety at home

# Resources

- Pediatric Symptom Checklist

<https://www.massgeneral.org/assets/mgh/pdf/psychiatry/psc/psc-english.pdf>

- SCARED Assessment

- <https://www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-06/SCARED-form-Parent-and-Child-version.pdf>

- **Children's of Alabama PIRC (Psychiatric Intake Response Center)**

- **205-638-7472 (PIRC)**

# Resources

- Pediatric Symptom Checklist

<https://www.massgeneral.org/assets/mgh/pdf/psychiatry/psc/psc-english.pdf>

- **Crisis Center Birmingham**

- <https://www.crisiscenterbham.org/>

- Crisis & Suicide Line

- (205) 323-7777

- **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:**

- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/98>

- **Need Support Now?**

- If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text [988](https://www.988lifeline.org) or chat [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)

- **UTalk Youth Line For Teens:**

- <https://www.crisiscenterbham.org/utalk/>

- Give us a call or send us a text. 205-328-5465

- **Bullying Resources:**

- <https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/get-help-now>

- **LGBTQ Mental Health Support:**

- <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/>



# Self-care for School Nurses

- Importance of Self-Care
  - Managing stress and preventing burnout
  - Professional Support networks
  - Personal stress management techniques
- **Tips on Preventing Nurse Burnout**
  1. Develop Strong Interpersonal Relationships.
  2. Set Boundaries Between Work and Personal Life.
  3. Get Enough Sleep.
  4. Care for Your Physical and Mental Health.
  5. Seek Out Regular Therapy or Assistant Programs



# Summary



Understand and  
identify anxiety



Immediate and long-  
term support  
strategies



Importance of  
collaboration and  
self-care



Final thoughts

Encourage continued  
learning and support for  
students with anxiety

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Questions?